The thaw of the Cold War has given new momentum to the revival and spread of liberal democracy and its corollary, capitalism. Just as missionaries once preached Christianity to “civilise” the colonial world, democracy has become the new gospel through which non-believers will be saved. Both donor and recipient countries appeal to democracy, hoping that democratisation will reverse several decades of misfortune. In Fieldhouse’s words, “economic and social development came to be seen as a moral obligation on the West, very much as the dissemination of Christianity had appeared a century earlier”. By prescribing democracy as a prerequisite for the provision of assistance, donor nations and international financial institutions (IFIs) sought to use foreign aid to obtain a closer control over political and economic systems of the so-called developing nations of the Third World or South.

The practices of developing and developed states alike call into question the sincerity of their commitment to democracy. Faith in the new gospel of democracy seems to depend upon what is at stake and on the importance and the loyalty of the player. A careful examination of the actions of states reveals that, while they may preach democracy, they nonetheless continue to pursue their national interests. The pursuit of national interests simultaneous with or in lieu of the pursuit of liberalisation undermines the North’s commitment to establishing genuine democracy in Africa and elsewhere. Indeed the economic, political, strategic, and ideological interests of Northern states often take precedence over the promulgation of democracy in the South.

1 The author would like to thank several colleagues and three anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft.
Democracy: An Elusive Concept

The very first problem with the promotion of democracy lies in determining what the term encompasses. Derived from the Greek words _demos_ (people) and _kratia_ (authority), democracy could be equated with “the rule by the people”, in contrast with the rule by the few (oligarchy), or the rule by one individual (monarchy or tyranny), or the rule of the gifted (aristocracy). However, because _demos_ referred to a particular social class, it is more appropriate to translate democracy as the rule of the “many”.

Although any political system can claim to further people’s interest, and a monarchy is a good example, only a democracy allows the majority to rule, and not just benefit. Designed originally as a type of government in which the people share in directing the activities of the state, democracy has seen its meaning altered or expanded to describe a philosophy that insists on the right and the capacity of a people, acting directly or through representatives, to control their institutions for their own purposes.

Despite the reverence the concept enjoys today, the reality is that democracy has, since an early stage, been subject to some controversy. Disagreement surrounding the essential elements of democracy can be traced even to the introduction of _demokratia_ around the fifth century BC in several Greek city-states. The fact that slaves and women were not allowed to vote in Ancient Greece raises a fundamental question about who “the people” are. It took several centuries of social movement before universal suffrage was widely adopted in the twentieth century. Another bone of contention concerned how the people should rule. The most dramatic change in the theory and practice of democracy occurred during the transition from direct democracy, as embodied in the institutions of Periclean Athens, to what is described today as liberal, representative, or constitutional democracy. Although modern scholars disagree on how much Athenian direct democracy, instituted by Cleisthenes in the reforms of 508-507 BC, and modern representative democracy have in common, they do agree that Athenian democratic ideals of freedom of statement, rotation of office, and equality before the law should be the goals of modern democracies.

Though the concrete meaning of democracy has varied considerably, consensus has emerged among the advanced, post-industrial powers of the North that democracy is essential to progress on a wide range of issues. It has rekindled attempts by the North to impose its will on the South. It is now clear that the waning of the Cold War has not ended pressures on the South. Rather, the North’s desire for alliance has been replaced by a more discreet insistence on the part of the international financial institutions and Western bilateral donors that developing countries should improve their “governance” mechanisms. However, the recent renewal of interest in democratic governance has done little to resolve lingering questions such as whether democracy must be conceived of as liberal democracy; whether democracy can only be applied to “governmental affairs”, or to the economic, social and cultural realms as well, and whether the most appropriate locus for democracy is the nation. Although with the end of the Cold War...
democracy seemed to have scored a historic victory over alternative forms of government, it still remains an essentially contested concept. Some twentieth century versions of democratic theory imagined that a viable democratic country would be a product of higher levels of modernisation, illustrated by its wealth, a bourgeois class structure, tolerant class values, and economic independence from external actors. However, since the third wave of democratisation, scholar focus upon necessary preconditions for democracy has made way for focus upon the dynamics of democratic transition. Several scholars have tried to understand how, without fulfilling all the prerequisites, some countries in the South were able to democratise or at least open up their political systems. Like democracy itself, democratisation means different things to different people. Many writers have spent their scholarly lifetimes teasing out the subtleties and nuances associated with conception of democracy (for example, Schumpeter, Dahl, Przeworski, Lipset, and Huntington). Yet, the concept remains elusive, still highly contested in analytical and ideological discourse. The current literature on democratisation deals with how to reach a political system that grants civic and political rights to citizens. Scholars generally agree that transition to democracy is normally a gradual, staged process rather than an abrupt and dramatic one. However, there is no agreement upon the number of stages that the process involves. There are definitional problems that undermine the ability of states to promote “democracy” abroad. Even good-intentioned actors can disagree about the end result they hope to achieve.

Globalisation of Democracy

For much of the last century the study of international relations was dominated by the realist tradition, which is chiefly concerned with how the global system of states conditions the behaviour of individual actors/states. At its simplest, the realist stance views the state as a vehicle for securing national and international order through the exercise of national power. Particularly within neorealist thinking, the state is almost taken for granted, with its goals assumed and little or no internal differentiation drawn between its elements. Yet, there is a new phenomenon in international politics

---

embraced by both academics and practitioners: democratisation. Neorealists may typically ignore democracy as an internal attribute of states. Yet a considerable amount of importance in world politics is now attached to the democratic (or otherwise) political systems of state actors, even if democracy means different things to different actors. The new importance assumed by democracy defies traditional neorealist thought, which distinguished international systems solely by the distribution of capabilities or by the number of great powers, and in which internal political arrangements play no role. Hence neorealism is increasingly unable to explain the phenomena we observe in our globalised world. Globalisation, closely associated with the growing hegemony of liberal capitalist values, provides a better explanation for the transborder spread of capitalist democracy.17

The North has always yearned to impose its will on the South. Its central concern has always been, and seems likely to remain, the securing of its own economic, political, strategic, or even ideological interests.18 Export markets, access to raw materials, the elimination of competitors, military bases, the settlement of its own “surplus” population, the security of sea routes, and other similar factors have long been the determinants of Northern policy towards the South. Selfish interests justified colonialism and imperialism, through the pretense of spreading civilisation from the North to the South. Although the whole colonial enterprise was ostensibly undertaken on a highly moral ground, the truth remains that European colonialism was more about grabbing lands than improving the welfare of the populations of the South. While Europeans could have strengthened any democratic culture they found in place, they chose to destroy any existing democratic ingredient in the political culture, in the South in general and in Africa in particular. There is no reason to imagine that the newfound importance in world politics attached to promoting democracy represents a change of heart.

The promotion of democracy in the South, and a shift away from supporting authoritarian regimes, seemingly has major implications for international politics and the restructuring of the global order. While the new attitude appears to usher in a new era in international relations, a brief survey of the North’s recent foreign policies tells a different story. The North has established a formal commitment to promoting democracy and human rights as an important tenet of its foreign policy goals. The victorious Allies initiated a wave of democratisation in Europe after the First World War. The defeat of the Axis powers during the second world conflagration was also followed by “democracy by the bayonets”.19 In the 1960s, de-colonisation triggered a great deal of hope for democratisation. In the throes of the Cold War, the promotion of democracy fell prey to the competition between capitalism and communism, and President Truman’s program of assistance for Greece and Turkey in 1947 is a good example of an appropriate response to the communist challenge.20 During his short term in office, President Kennedy gave concrete statement to this policy through the

17 See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York, 1992)
Alliance for Progress in Latin America. Attempts were also made in the 1970s and 1980s to lend United States’ (US) support to “democratic” regimes all over the world.

Other European countries embarked on the same path, devoting most of their foreign aid packages to “democratic” developing countries. However, the democratic commitment gradually waned as the Cold War intensified. Fear of the spread of communism made most Western powers oblivious to the abuses and incompetence of many non-democratic governments in the developing world. Whatever was left in the “democratic creed” simply vanished, and aid and support became conditional upon loyalty. Even odious regimes were labelled “friendly” as long as they remained consistent in their support of Western countries’ policies and goals. Speaking of loyal recipients of foreign aid, one US President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was even alleged to have said of certain foreign leaders, “they may be sons of bitches but at least they are our sons of bitches”.

The commitment to democracy and improving human rights has always been provisional, and apparently always secondary to considerations of regional or global security and economic interests. So far, there is very little evidence that the renewed push for democracy is going to be any different this time. Globalisation is driving the North to place its own national economic interests above altruistic interests such as the promotion of genuine democracy in the South. Obviously the end of the Cold War has lent some credence to the promotion of democracy. However, a closer look at the interplay between national and international politics belies a genuine intention of supporting democracy for democracy’s sake. As much as a new world has emerged at this “end of history”, the rules of the game continue to be mostly the same. In this “new world order” still in the making, old habits still persist. Although both the US government and Congress have announced spreading democracy to be one of the main pillars of US foreign policy, the rationale behind this policy still remains unwrapped. Other countries’ efforts to fight totalitarian and authoritarian forms of rule also remain to be desired.

The underlying persistence of the North’s inclinations to engage in democracy promotion in the South is based more on economic and political rationales than on true devotion to democracy. Despite efforts by Northern nations to conceal ulterior motives, their deeds (or lack thereof) often give the lie to their intentions. Having acknowledged that the spread of democracy is intimately related to US hegemony, Kagan concedes that “there is a strong connection between America’s unparalleled influence in the world and the spread of democracy”. Alluding to the US “mission” of democracy promotion, Carol Lancaster argues that the promotion of democracy assumes a practical function as well as a moral compass. Most importantly, it justifies a US foreign aid budget of $15 billion a year.

If there is any region where political imperatives have clearly dictated US behaviour, it is in South America. US policy toward Latin America evolved throughout three decades of Big-Stick Diplomacy and the Good Neighbour Policy under Roosevelt

---

and Truman, through Cold War interventionism from Eisenhower to Ford, to Carter’s human rights program, then the Reagan Doctrine,25 and the Bush/Clinton “drug war”. All of these different policies have been clearly guided by Washington’s desire to maintain stability and control in the region.26 The US continues to protect its interests in Latin America, via democratisation, and Zarate is right in his contention that “democratisation and regime formation in Central America is a direct result of Washington’s influence and sheer power at specific periods in the countries’ histories. Individuals are able to act, but they are constrained by the corral of US hegemony”.27 The US supported the removal of several democratically elected political leaders because they did not fit the profile of the “ideal” Latin American leader according to the Monroe Doctrine. While the American-led overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile is an obvious example, other scenarios in Latin America demonstrate that US choice between democracy and its national interest is unambiguous.

In fact, several scholars have caustically dismissed attempts to promote democracy abroad. Dahl, for example, maintains that “as a strategy for transforming nonpolyarchies into polyarchies, the American foreign aid program must be adjudged a total failure […] [with] not a single such success to its credit”.28 In a comprehensive review of US policies in the 1980s, Whitehead also concludes that “despite the rhetoric, Washington’s real achievements in the promotion of democracy in Latin America have been relatively meager”.29 If Dahl’s contention is accurate that the process of transformation is too complex and too poorly understood to justify the promotion of democracy,30 then the ability of the US or any other country to affect the development of democracy elsewhere is limited.31

However, proponents of globalisation have observed, with obvious satisfaction, that there is an increasing consensus across and within states that democracy is the adequate standard upon which to judge the political legitimacy of states. Although upholding such a moral appropriateness of democratic legitimacy raises problems due to the lack of consensus on the definition of democracy, several western countries and international financial institutions stick to their new gospel. Unfortunately, the words hardly match the actions or deeds, and when put to the test in Africa, France and Britain follow the example of the US in Latin America by opting for a position consistent with their foreign policy goals, rather than supporting democracy for its own sake.

In his attempt to tie British values to the protection of British interests, Robin Cook, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary from 1997 to 2001, maintained that “the forces of globalisation that are bringing peoples closer are also bringing other peoples’ suffering closer to home. The open markets [Britain] depends on for [its] prosperity

---

27 Zarate, Forging Democracy, p. 28.
30 Dahl, Polyarchy, p. 214.
depend in turn on open societies these markets lie in”.32 Even the 1998 joint declaration in Saint-Malo, France, between the British and French Foreign Ministers, seeking a “common vision of promoting positive change and respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law”,33 failed its test in Africa. Although both France and Britain pledged to defend democracy, human rights, good governance and development, once again, French President Chirac hid behind an “African rhythm” to democratisation. Neither side could uphold either the spirit or the letter of Saint-Malo.

The obstacles to holding a common and firm position on democratisation and the rule of law were also demonstrated by the Francophone Summit in Moncton, Canada, in September 1998. Even though it was heralded as the summit of human rights and democracy, the rhetoric of the final declaration failed to match any concrete actions to genuinely promote and protect human rights and democracy.34 Another instance of inconsistencies in the promotion of democracy is Denmark’s ambiguous stance. In its “Strategy 2000” report, the Danish government recognised that most governments have yet to commit themselves to the protection of human rights and democracy. However, because “policy dialogue and partnership should define the allocation of aid”,35 countries with spotty human rights records such as Burkina Faso, Zambia and Zimbabwe received substantial aid, raising some doubt about what is being promoted.

Promotion of democracy or of National Interests?

After several decades of firm control over African politics, European powers discovered that only “good governance” and “democracy” could help the beleaguered African countries escape their misery.36 With the focus on characteristic virtues of democratic governance — transparency, responsiveness, accountability, official propriety and tolerance37 — democratisation appeared as an important item on the agendas of Western nations. Donor approaches fall into two broad categories: those which use aid as a lever for pressuring governments to opt for reform, and policies founded on positive measures. The first generally takes the form of political conditionality, where donors suspend, reduce or terminate development assistance pending improved performance on a range of participatory development and good governance (PDGG) indicators. The second hinges on a more supportive approach in which aid donors seek to strengthen an ongoing reform process through carefully selected projects and programs. However, while the end of the Cold War permits the new tune of “democratisation” to be sung38 and a new aid policy, the sincerity of Western nations’ intention to see democracy take hold in Africa has been called into question because of particular interests at stake.39

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 Robin A. Luckham and Gordon White, “Introduction”, in Luckham and White, Democratization in the South, p. 3.
And indeed, France’s attitude vis-à-vis the political situation in Algeria, and its position in the democratisation process in both Benin and Togo, suggest a gap between the theory and practice of democratisation in Africa. Since President de Gaulle at least, France has acted as a provider of legitimacy to its former colonies. Both incumbents and their opponents in Francophone Africa factor this variable into their political calculus, and most take their cues from Paris. While several autocratic regimes managed, thanks to the support of their “master”, and through diverse political schemes, to get on the democratisation wagon, these governments remain mere “illiberal democracies”, still at the disposal of their former colonial powers.

There is no doubt that the international community seems to be rejoicing at Africa’s emerging democracies, in the hope that democracy’s new dawn on the continent could help change the course of Africa’s recent history. The change from a bipolar to a multipolar international system opened the way for introducing issues such as human rights and democracy into international aid rhetoric. However, there is hardly any coherence with foreign aid policy. While some view the lack of coherence over objectives, approaches and delivery mechanisms as a source of poor implementation, the fact remains that policy incoherence could also be deliberate because of the stake or goal set up by donor countries.

In the academic debate following the proclamation of the new political agenda of aid conditionality, a number of motives were stressed to explain the raison d’être of attaching preconditions to for the provision of aid. It was argued that one of the important reasons for introducing democracy and human rights as conditions for aid was to ensure a continued minimum of domestic popular support for aid programs within donor countries, since development assistance had lost most of its political rationale with the thawing of the Cold War. Economic difficulties at home have forced donor countries to find stronger arguments to justify their aid policy. Indeed another motive altogether for linking democratic governance and democracy may have been to establish a set of politically acceptable arguments for cutting aid now that aid no longer served its former political and security purposes. But, it could also simply be that the euphoria following the fall of the Berlin Wall led to a somewhat arrogant belief that western political values were the “best”, and, as such, could be exported anywhere.

Although there are only a few studies of the aid motives of the European Community, Bowles for one, concluded that donor interests have been far more

---

45 See Lancaster, “Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa”; also Conteh-Morgan, *Democratization in Africa*.
47 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History*. 
important than recipients’ needs. It has also been demonstrated that countries’ behaviour within the Community was different. The influence of the member-states is not equally distributed, and France is by far the most influential member within the development aid system of European Union. This observation is confirmed by another study, which emphasises the difference between the European countries as far as aid motivations are concerned. The authors concluded that French aid is almost exclusively donor-interest driven, whereas Dutch aid was almost totally determined by recipient country needs. France’s position as the most influential member of the European Union should be of little surprise, given its open and stated desire to dominate both Europe and Africa. It is obvious that France is forced to go along with the Union most of the time in order to avoid being seen as a dissenter. However, the reality is that the Union’s agenda cannot supersede France’s, and democratisation is a good illustration. Despite the “positive” attributes of democracy, France is not ready to sacrifice its interests on the altar of democratisation, and Algeria and Togo demonstrate the shortcomings of France’s policy.

The 1992 events in Algeria exposed not only the lack of sincerity in western nations’ rhetoric of democratisation but also France’s obstinacy in seeing democratisation move at its chosen speed. In the new mood of political reforms, Algeria embarked on a democratisation path. Given the recent past of the country, Algerians saw in the new move a chance to turn things around. They went to the polls and voted for a new regime. Unfortunately, their choice came as quite a shock to both Algerian and French authorities. The first round of parliamentary elections gave a clear majority to the “Islamic Fundamentalists”, and that was unacceptable to both Algeria and France. Consequently, and with no apparent alternative, the second round of elections was called off, and since then an open and dirty war has been waged between the government and the “Fundamentalists”. Strong belief in democracy simply vanished when it became apparent that the government might take an “Islamic” turn and the issue of “security” overtook democracy: democratisation was ended for stability’s sake.

Although there have since been — albeit controversial — presidential elections that saw Abdel-Aziz Bouteflika become the new President of Algeria, nothing guarantees security in the country, and the defiance of the “Fundamentalists” remains a bad omen for Algeria’s future. If the goal was to ensure security at the expense of democracy, France might have miscalculated its moves, since there now seems to be neither

---

54 Ibid., p. 540.
56 See Conac, L’Afrique en Transition vers le Pluralisme Politique.
security nor genuine democracy in Algeria, paralleling the situation of Togo. While African leaders were forced to open up the political systems of their countries, loyal “clients” of France, such as Éyadéma of Togo, managed to remain in power with France’s assistance, despite popular uproar.

When the tide of democratisation reached Africa’s shores in the 1990s, Togo was not spared. France seemed to have required all African countries to reform their political systems, if they were to continue maintaining good relations with their former colonial power. Consequently, Benin had to democratise and did so under pressure from France. However, the special relationship between France and Togo clearly puts Togo on a different pedestal. As Togo was a member of the French pré-carré or chasse-gardée (closed circle) in Africa, France was willing to and did sacrifice democracy. Regardless of how much rhetoric goes on within the international community, powerful nations continue to be guided by their national interests.

There was a great deal of expectation that France as the country which had such an important revolution as occurred in 1789 should take advantage of the wind of change blowing on the continent to help finally bring about a new era of reform in Africa. That belief was so strong that France’s declaration at La Baule was interpreted as a genuine intent to contribute to the restoration of democracy on the continent. But, unfortunately, a year later at the Chaillot Palace in Paris, African leaders had to face a reality check, when France brought a very important nuance to its position. Having linked any further aid to democratisation a year earlier, France later recommended that African countries follow their own pace of democratisation. In other words, the first injunction to reform was replaced with a tremendous amount of flexibility, creating a great deal of confusion to this date. France’s efforts at keeping other members of its pré-carré such as Gabon and Côte d’Ivoire under its control, by dictating the nature and the speed of their political reforms, are also noticeable. France has not made the promotion of democracy a high priority in Africa because it has historically been an imperial master with hegemonic influence on the continent. In Kagan’s words, “France seems to have retained its traditional approach, remaining largely unconcerned about the promotion of democracy”.

In an effort to seek a coordination of policies among donor countries, Britain also embarked on the “cosmopolitan democratic governance” path, adopting a new policy of linking foreign aid to “good governance”. According to the former Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd:

While countries tending towards pluralism, public accountability, respect for the rule of law, human rights and market principles should be encouraged, those which persisted with repressive policies, corrupt management, or with wasteful and discredited economic systems should not expect aid donors to support their folly with scarce aid resources which could be used better elsewhere.

57 See Conteh-Morgan, Democratization in Africa.
60 John F. Clark, “The Challenges of Political Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Theoretical Overview”, in Clark and Gardinier, Political Reform on Francophone Africa, p. 34.
Making the promotion of “good governance” a cardinal principle of its foreign aid policy, Britain threatened to withhold aid from governments that abuse human rights, and/or are corrupt and undemocratic. However, right from start, it appeared that Britain’s national interests and goals would prevail over democratisation. Pressure to democratise varied depending on the country and the quality of its relations with Britain.

While Britain demanded that the corrupt military regime of Nigeria and the left-leaning government of Zambia get on the “democratisation train”, Life-President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi was instead advised to abandon his autocratic rule, and Kenya was only urged or advised to adopt a multiparty political system. Although Kenya has stalled on promises of democratic reforms and lies in a state of worsening political and economic crisis, it remains a top British foreign aid recipient, receiving during 1998/99 more than £43 million from Britain. There are other cases of similar, inconsistent British policy. Despite his insistence on an original “no-party” democratic system, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni continued to enjoy the favours of the West. Britain’s 1998/99 aid package to Uganda amounted to more than £64 millions. Even the overthrow of a long-standing multiparty system in the Gambia, in 1994, only called for a trimming of British foreign aid. Despite its lamentable record on human rights and intolerance of dissent, Gambia remains a “friend” of Britain’s, with a development assistance package worth £7.5 millions over the next three years.

Like France and other western countries, Britain judges that it is inconvenient to tread on the toes of governments that it does not wish to offend or antagonise. While Robin Cook echoed his predecessor Douglas Hurd’s sentiment about the importance of the promotion of democracy and upholding human rights, he did add a caveat when he maintained that these are not objectives Britain could realize everywhere instantaneously, or everywhere by the same means. Although some of Britain’s former colonies have democratised, Britain’s foreign policy, on the whole, “has only sporadically placed a premium on the spread of democracy abroad”.

Although official Western rhetoric seems to suggest a goal of improving conditions in Third World countries by striking some sort of balance between individual rights and the responsibilities of the state, the reality is baffling at best. There are grounds to doubt the sincerity of Western countries that claim to want to promote good governance, aid the growth of democracy, and thereby promote economic growth, social progress and combat poverty. Some of their declarations seem to convey a rather different, contradictory message. A statement by Lynda Chalker, the Tory British Minister of Overseas Development from 1989 to 1997, is a good example:

66 Ibid.
67 See Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record*.
70 Cook, “Foreword”.
[Good governance] is not neo-colonialist or neo-imperialist. It cannot be imposed on developing countries; their effort can be sustained and helped effectively only through a just and democratic system of good governance, in a world, which interests are served by a healthy global economy and open trading environment.\(^\text{72}\)

In a similar vein, Robin Cook, as a Labour Foreign Secretary, said that the North “will be better able to trade with countries that are stable and operate by the rule of law”.\(^\text{73}\) Such opinions clearly reflect both the overriding concern and the underlying attitude of western countries’ endeavours to renew democracy in the Third World. What matters is not democracy and its potential virtues, but the policy goal of making the developing world politically more stable, economically more secure, and safer for financial investment. At least, this is the conclusion which seems to be emerging from a scrutiny of western countries’ foreign aid-for-democracy policies. This ambiguous attitude of the West vis-à-vis the promotion of democracy explains Carothers’s concern when he warns that “basing a call for a democracy-oriented foreign policy on an assumption of vast American influence over other countries’ political fortunes only sets up the policy edifice for a fall”.\(^\text{74}\)

### IFIs and the Spread of Democracy

As the examples above illustrate, Northern states use their own foreign policy as a Trojan horse in which democratisation conceals more selfish interests. They also pursue similar tactics through their participation in international financial institutions (IFIs), most significantly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Voting privileges within these organisations rely on a weighted system according to the contributions of Member States. In contrast to the “one state-one vote” system of the United Nations General Assembly, where the developing world enjoys a numerical majority, rich countries exert great influence on IFIs. The largest contributors to the World Bank and the IMF, mostly Northern states, enjoy disproportionate control over these institutions. The United States alone holds 17 per cent of the vote at the World Bank, with G-7 countries collectively holding nearly half. The developing South, often the target of policies adopted by both institutions, exercises minimal control over the formation of those policies.

For instance, the IMF has routinely imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), also known as “austerity programs”, on developing states in an effort to stem inflation. These SAPs require that the developing states curtail spending on social programs. Without the safety net provided by these social programs, people who previously may have been able to subsist, descend into poverty. The devastating effects of the SAPs must be taken in light of the power relationships that exist within the IFIs that impose them. Despite the fact that the same financial ills plaguing developing countries in the South also exist in some Northern nations, SAPs seem to be only designed or suited for the South. While the Bretton Woods institutions pretend to “empower ordinary people”, their good governance parlance reveals rather the near fusion of democracy and economic liberalism, a failed medicine once prescribed by modernisation theorists.

---


\(^\text{73}\) Cook, “Foreword”.

In light of the developed North’s advocacy of democratisation for the South, it is hardly surprising that they would carry this unilateral preference into the IFIs over which they exercise nearly exclusive control. IFIs often make aid to these developing countries conditional on progress toward democratisation. While research indicates that democracy can have a positive impact on economic and social development, making much-needed aid conditional upon liberal reform undermines the sincerity with which reform is undertaken. Politics as usual beneath the veneer of reform in most aid-receiving countries continues, while IFIs and developed Member States overlook the inadequacy of these democratic “reforms”.

Governance in the global political economy seems to be achieved through a new diplomacy where firms and banks play as important a role as states. In Strange’s words, “a small group of people controls the necessary know-how and technology: the ‘international business’ with scientists as priests and efficiency as the religion”. Although conventional explanations ignore the power of discourse and its role in the construction and maintenance of Western hegemony in the Third World, the truth is that the “good governance” or “development” discourse championed by IFIs and their main sponsors simply legitimise the right of the North to intervene in, control and “develop” the South.

**Conclusion**

The North and IFIs would want the world, specifically the South, to believe in their efforts to make the world “safer for democracy”. However, the whole enterprise is suffering from a few shortcomings. Great-power rivalries or ideological conflicts continue to generate disunity within the ranks because of security considerations or fear and uncertainty. Policies with mixed motives in which states pursue both altruistic and selfish goals do not always preclude the achievement of worthwhile objectives. However, in this case there is ample evidence to indicate that the competition between selfish and altruistic interests is often resolved in favour of the former and at the expense of the latter. Selfish motives more often than not undermine democratisation in the South. In some instances, undemocratic regimes can, and sometimes must, be maintained as long as they remain loyal to the West. International efforts at democratisation can also be inhibited by the concern that change might produce unforeseeable consequences. As a matter of fact, the North seems more comfortable dealing with loyal, albeit illiberal, “democracies”. While external forces can effectively narrow the options available to recalcitrant regimes, and bolster insurgent groups, most of them are also prepared to subordinate democracy to other economic and geostrategic considerations.

Through either the contagion approach or great power “control”, democratisation, like globalisation, seems to be on the move. However, what democratisation really means, and why some Western countries seem “adamant” about its progress, raise

---

some concern. So far, the “divine mandate” to democratise the South has a troubling
to resemble with the colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Just as
“civilisation” was once used as a powerful instrument to subdue African peoples,
democratisation is now a new tool with which the nations of the North pursue their
national interests. According to Sorensen, “Western countries pursue their own agenda,
irrespective of the broader consequences for democracy”. While a few nations in the
North are clearly trying to give a renewed sense of hope to peoples in the South, most
Northern powers are simply lip-synching the “democratisation” tune, because their
particular goals do not allow them to articulate the words. Until there is a consistency
in the North’s attitude towards democratisation, and similar standards are used to judge
the performance of developing countries, a huge cloud of doubt will hang over Western
countries’ efforts at promoting democracy. To bring about an era of genuine Pax
Democratica, the North must, at a minimum, set aside the pursuit of national interests
that are inimical to democracy in the South.

---

80 Georg Sorensen, “The Impasse of Third World Democratization: Africa Revisited”, in M. Cox, G.J.
Ikenberry and T. Inoguchi, eds., American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts